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ABSTRACT

Consultation in high school-based day care settings for adolescent parents and their children is presented as a program which emphasizes the developmental tasks of both the parents and the children within a cultural context, and the potential conflicts between the two. The role of the consultant is described in terms of his/her ability to: (1) assess the sometimes subtle meanings of interactions between the administrator, staff, and parents; (2) facilitate the working relationships between the administrator and staff; and (3) identify appropriate interventions for aiding the individual development of the parents and their children. (HLM)

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Consultation in High School Based Day Care Settings: The Interfacing of Developmental and Socio-Cultural Needs

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Consultation in High School Based Day Care Settings: The Interfacing of Developmental and Socio-Cultural Needs

Glendora Patterson

This paper is a discussion of consultation in high school-based day care settings for adolescent parents and their children. Using vignettes from an actual consultation experience, the discussion highlights the urgency for taking a new look at the developmental tasks of both adolescent parents and children within a cultural context and with respect to the heightened conflict posed by their relationship with each other. The paper also represents a developmental experience for me in terms of my growing awareness of the implications and meanings of the dynamics involved.

As a consultant assessing the dynamics of a child care center, I find it important to take into account the human and social systems to which young parents relate, as well as the many forces impinging upon them and their children daily. For the young parents, these social/human systems may include the parent's child, the young parent's own family with whom she may or may not be living, the high school in all its diversity, the day care center, the child's other parent or the young mother's current mate, the parent's peer group and perhaps several community systems such as the welfare department and the health clinic. The impinging forces may include socio-economic stresses, peer pressures or demands, conflicting family attitudes and expectations, diffi-

culties in meeting academic demands and general physical and emotional strains related to growing up.

We recognize that both young child and adolescent parent are in highly charged developmental periods (Weigle, September-October 1974, p. 23). The child in seeking to develop trust and identity requires consistent attentive care from nurturing parent figures for adequate physical, social, emotional and intellectual development (McLaughlin, 1976, pp. 87-133). The adolescent, struggling with his/her own sexuality and efforts to resolve the developmental identity crisis and achieve adulthood, also needs adult models, peer support and help toward independence (Josselyn, 1953, pp. 93-109; Erickson, 1968, pp. 128-138). Up to age three, the child is primarily in a state of unconsciousness of self, his/her psychic situation being inseparable from the parents', although an individual self-consciousness is potentially recognizable (Jung, 1954). This is important to note since it implies that the well-being and independence of the child are highly dependent on the well-being and sense of independence demonstrated by the parent.

All of these developmental and socio-cultural conflicts between the various subsystems in the child care setting pose important questions for how the consultant will intervene and establish priorities within the consultative processes.

One of the settings where I served as consultant provided rich opportunities for examination of these developmental and cultural foci. This day care center, located in an inner-city community, provides care for up to twenty-four (24) infants and

toddlers while their parents who range in age from 15 to 19 years attend academic and vocational classes at a high school across the street. The center itself provides formal courses in child development and on-the-floor practice in childcaring activities for the children's parents, pregnant girls and potential child care workers. The majority of parents using or interning at the center are Black (more than 90%) and all the parents I observed were female.

The center staff includes a director who is white and 3 Black teacher aides. At times, 1 to 3 special education student assistants gain field credits through volunteering one or two 40-minute class periods daily at the center.

The center director is administratively responsible to the vice principal in charge of instruction, as delegated by the school principal.

At best, the center's relationship to the school system is tenuous, as the school's stated priority is the education of the high school students, not provision of care for students' children. The center is considered experimental, is unlicensed and, in effect, receives little support from top school administrators.

Although the center director is a credentialed teacher, she works longer hours and receives fewer supports than other teachers in the school system.

I am using this setting as a background for describing four (4) vignettes, each it seems to me reflecting both developmental and socio-cultural conflicts confronting the consultee and

the consultant.

Vignette I

The child development course taught at the center provided a dramatic demonstration of contrasting needs of young parents and staff. A typical situation occurred several times when the question of discipline or alternatives to punishment of young children came up. Rarely were the young parents able to focus on their own roles as parents in these discussions. Most often, they were concerned with how their own parents punished, controlled or abused them. In contrast, the administrator wanted young parents to be more effective parents; the adolescents wanted their own parents to be effective parents for them. Also the white administrator imposed her own values and experiences related to discipline, seldom indicating familiarity with the disciplinary practices of Black families or of the young parents' families, either through reference to pertinent literature or use of perspectives from Black staff or available consultants.

Vignette II

The different responses of children, parents and the center director in trying to conform to school regularities (Sarason 1971, pp. 62-87) pose another vivid example of contrasting needs. The staff often tried to arrange to have naptimes for children coincide with the 40-minute regular school periods. The school cafeteria provided meals for the center although the meals were usually inappropriate for young children and arrived

at times inconvenient for eating. To my knowledge, no consultation ever occurred between cafeteria and center staff. When I began the consultation, it was the principal who hired the child care staff, usually without the director's involvement so that the person hired frequently was ill-qualified to work with both children and existing staff. This seriously undermined the director's authority and morale.

Further, this way of operating by the white school principal who had little direct contact with the center minimized opportunities for hiring people sensitive to the unique needs and realities of Black infants and adolescent parents.

Vignette III

A third example of conflicting needs centered around one of the high school's stated goals for the center; i.e. helping young parents "avoid the welfare cycle." One strategy into which staff put much effort was having professional experts make presentations during the center's child development classes. Despite the fact that the students were mostly Black and poor, little attention was given to thinking through how people break out of the welfare cycle nor was any discernible Black perspective obvious in the curriculum or teaching approach. These were young parents with myriad social, economic, health and educational problems which were rarely addressed in ways useful or appropriate to the realities of Black adolescents. For example, the experts rarely did their teaching in the child care sections of the center where they might have demonstrated and commented on parent-child

interactions. Again, focus was almost always on the parent's child rather than on the parent herself. Here again we see opposing needs: the school expects certain curricular content to be presented with respect to child development; the young parent seems more concerned with her own development as a child/adult.

There is irony and perhaps a basic contradiction in setting goals for helping an adolescent break the welfare cycle while at the same time training her to be a child care worker since most child care work basically results in dead end, low paid jobs in this society. If another center goal is to help adolescents become more effective parents, the consultant may need to help school and center re-assess what parent training means for adolescents. Also, the staff working with young children in day care settings frequently work too-long hours with inadequate training and support. The pressures on staff are greatly intensified when the children are infants and their parents are adolescents. The consultant will need to help administrative personnel assess and attend to the needs of staff in such a setting.

Often, the teacher aides and parents whose education and training the day care administrator hopes to upgrade seem representative of the "disadvantaged adults" described by London and Stern (1974) as the "missing clientele." By "missing clientele" the authors refer to groups of adults theoretically targeted by but unreached in reality by adult education programs: minorities, blue collar workers and the poor in general. Failure to reach

these groups relates largely to inaccurate assessment of their needs and strengths as I hope to show a little later on when I talk about the implications of developmental and cultural assessment for the practice of consultation.

Teacher aides are often so-called minorities relegated to the least creative roles (i.e., least valued or "dirty work" roles) with children. Aides, among the lowest paid workers in the labor market, are often perceived to be apathetic and only marginally intelligent. Similarly, many day care parents would be stigmatized as "missing clientele" merely by virtue of their eligibility for publicly-funded or supported day care programs. Participation in these programs designed to promote economic self-sufficiency usually requires that parents be welfare eligible, which means they are usually working for low wages, are involved in what in effect are dead-end training programs or are in receipt of AFDC grants or some combination of these. Again, the majority of parents using such programs tend to be minorities. Often the administrator is from the dominant culture, having had the opportunity to achieve the required, acceptable educational and administrative qualifications.

Vignette IV

The fourth example of contrasting developmental and cultural needs involves the developmental nature of the center itself -- its growth in providing quality care for children; in supporting young parents; in development of its staff for relating positively to both parents and children; in surviving/evolving as

an institution and in development of a cultural focus appropriate to the population it serves. All the humans involved, whether they are children, parents, staff or director benefit from nurturing relationships, reasonable expectations and positive feedback. Yet the socio-cultural realities of the center often prevented real collaboration between staff and director. Low income status and unequal educational opportunity often widened the communications gap. I often observed demonstration of expensive commercial, and sometimes inappropriate toys in the classroom which few of the parents could have afforded to purchase. It seemed, too, that the parents enjoyed playing with the toys for their own sake. As consultant, I sought ways to encourage the making of toys by the parents with no- or low-cost materials which allowed more creativity, cultural expression and participation. The center director always referred to the parents as "young ladies" which I found incongruous. On the other hand, I never heard a Black staff member refer to the parents or students as "ladies". Perhaps this phenomenon, too, was a function of a culturally-determined communications gap.

Recurrent comments to me by the center director about staff reflected her frustrations with what she perceived to be a lack of creativity, initiative and appreciation for child development on the part of the aides. From a cultural viewpoint, these were distorted expectations of staff. Such distortions intrigued me. For example, one aide was a mother of seven who worked an eight-hour night shift as a licensed vocational nurse -- another type of dead-end aide position, by the way. While

having seven children does not automatically make a parent an expert in childrearing, it does represent an authentic range of experiences which the director might have tapped for the center. The irony of this particular situation is that the aide, often tired from holding down two jobs and responded to unappreciatively due to her unorthodox childrearing practices (e.g., "old-fashioned" about sex play and discipline) was not regarded as a resource since the director assessed staff potential inappropriately. The aide was well-liked by young parents, however, but seemed to use her popularity in ways that irritated the director (being too chummy with girls but not with staff). Consequently, the center did not benefit fully from the aide's experiential knowledge nor did she seem to gain support and appreciation from her co-workers and the director, realities which held rather dismal implications for her continued performance, promotion and evaluation.

Implications for Consultation

The consultant's skill in assessing the sometimes subtle meanings of situations such as these will greatly influence the type of intervention utilized. I often felt at a loss as to how to address the director's concerns in ways that counteracted the remedial and socially controlling approaches represented in such situations, given my growing awareness of their meaning. Efforts to involve parents or to train aides, I recognized, could become a form of cooperation with society's efforts to produce a conforming population (Montiel, 1974). Conforming to the administrator's expectations could result in reinforcement of the pattern of

poverty and powerlessness characteristic of the "missing clientele" to which I referred earlier. The administrator is not usually aware of these potential results since she, too, can be filling a role as a social control agent, exercising society's "fundamental hostility to home and life styles of the poor" (Lazerson, 1970). I think it is because of these largely unconscious "fundamental hostilities" that administrators seem rarely to sense that they can learn from aides and parents (Lambie, 1975-1976), an important factor in culturally diverse day care settings.

Aides and parents surely sense it when their values and inputs are not incorporated in the program, which further reinforces the kind of negative self-concept often found among "missing clientele" (Lorge, from an undated reprint). This negative self-concept is largely a learned response which aides may develop (1) to growing older, given a society which places diminishing value on growing older, and (2) to feeling that they have little to contribute in contacts with their co-workers or the administrator. The oldest aide at the center where I consulted frequently took the position in the administrator's presence that she had no suggestions for how to analyze or solve a particular problem, usually deferring to the administrator whose job she felt it was to solve problems. Occasionally, in the absence of the administrator, this same aide would offer very useful solutions to problems, sometimes exercising sound administrative judgment.

Given my growing awareness of the complex meanings of these situations at the interface of opposing and developmental needs, I think I could have given more attention to generating

critical dialogue (Freire, 1972) aimed at facilitating growth of mind and spirit (Redfield, 1955) among parents, aides and administrators. It has always intrigued me that day care and other child care programs seem genuinely to strive for creation of environments suitable to enhancing the learning of young children. Yet these same programs fail to nurture this same potential for a sense of wonder (Redfield, 1955) in the adults who work with the children. Also, the notion of a sense of wonder seems so incongruous with a society which places such a high value on conformity. What I see more often in day care is in reality an oppressive environment (perhaps unwittingly racist, sexist in nature) staffed by oppressed people relating to children in ways which are potentially suppressive for children. This further complicates the learning situation which the consultation will address.

In day care, consultation is largely a process for facilitating learning, not only for parents and aides, but hopefully for the administrator as well. In addition to the knowledge and skills required by the consultant in her particular field (e.g., early childhood education, psychology, social work, health services, nutrition and food services), there is also much information in the adult education field which I think has specific relevance to consultation. The consultant might draw on the knowledge of adult education both to sharpen her understanding of the context of the day care aide or parent's learning needs and to assess more accurately the relevance of her diagnostic and interventive strategies for promoting the desired learning or change. For instance, I observed that the director often presented information

to aides and parents in lecture format or from written materials while aides and parents tended to indicate that they learned best from day-to-day experiences.

I think consultation can be of increasing usefulness to schools and day care centers in providing better supports and models to adolescents and children toward resolution of their respective developmental tasks if we can find convincing ways to present our professional concerns. One convincing way might be through modelling. The need for caring and for visible role models in these developmental processes is well-documented (Josselyn; McLaughlin; Erickson). Based on these realities, I propose that the consultant working with Black adolescents and young children in inner-city schools consider interventions based on <u>developmental modelling</u>; that is, modelling for and generating other models for this dyad in ways which facilitate their development, through identification, as competent human beings. The second major intent of this approach is its simultaneous concern with the "developmental needs" of the interfacing systems (i.e., helping center and school personnel evolve new understandings of and supports for the adolescent and child). While many of the ideas presented here will have relevance for other minority or oppressed groups, I refer primarily to the interests of Black people.

It seems to me that the major responsibility of the consultant, then, should be to help the various systems we have identified (community, school, family, day care center) see and respond to the young parent and child in light of their social and developmental tasks. This might call for radical shifts in

the way these systems plan, set priorities for, and serve the adolescent parent/child dyad. The consultant might urge the school's attention to a critical re-examination of its goals for and responsibilities to this complex dyad rather than expect the dyad, because of its involvement with the day care center, to somehow behave contrary to its unique characteristics.

Because there are so few techniques specifically developed for working with Black youth and young children, the consultant will need to demonstrate and point out to school/center personnel ways for training staff or working with parents, as well as be a participant in the process. For example, an historical context for discussing childrearing approaches might be introduced with the consultant providing materials (role-play scripts, poems about children for reading aloud and discussing) that encourage active participation in learning by staff and/or parents. Or the consultant might facilitate the organization of an oral history series on several aspects of child care or youth activities, inviting grandparents to do the oral history based on their own experiences as parents (Mead, 1974). While their approaches would no doubt differ from the center's, the consultant could facilitate identification and discussion of the differences in approach, giving staff and parents a shared, authentic experience. These kinds of involvements would demonstrate a genuine concern to capture the cultural strengths in the families' histories while promoting supportive relationships between parents/children and significant others.

The consultant would advocate for more community-based

educational experiences for young parents, e.g., a trip to a Black bookstore to select books to be read with their children at a planned time. Developing a simple, annotated bibliography might be undertaken by staff/parents for sharing or publication. Also, supervised exercises in problem-solving (e.g., We're getting a new staff member. What would you like her to know about your child in order to give him good care during her first week at work?) might appeal to young parents if their assistance was genuinely sought and used.

Black adolescents and young children may be thought of in one sense as an oral and musical people (Billingsley, 1974), so that rap sessions and music-oriented activities might provide natural environments for dialogue with young people.

Young Black parents could be made aware of the developmental strengths of African babies as one way of thinking about their own children's development (Evans, J.L., 1970; Erny, 1973). The purpose for proposing this is three-fold: Young parents might find it stimulating to see a film like "Africa: The Cradle of Humanity" which depicts the birth and precociousness of the average African infant and the mother's sensitive attention to the infant during the first 18 months; young parents might spark to comparing their own and their parents' perceptions about child-rearing with those common to African cultures; and, young parents' sense of identity and identification with their African heritage might be addressed.

The consultant could encourage that much of the child development teaching be done on-floor with parents, consultant

or resource person modelling the desired behaviors in direct interaction with children and parents. This would be in contrast to regular formal classes followed by a lab hour. Formal classes in a day care environment seem so contrived, especially if one favors the notion that people learn best by doing. Also, adolescents I have observed tended to resist sitting in formal groups. It is likely, too, that the children would benefit from the additional attention and, in the long run, from increased caring skills learned by the parent.

In the day care setting I have described, the Black staff was quite distant in their communications with me until I negotiated an arrangement whereby I could meet directly with all staff, usually in the full group, occasionally on a one-to-one basis. Again, I was aware of myself as a model for both director and staff in facilitating and structuring communications where previously there had been little. For example, this center had no regularly scheduled staff meetings, largely, I observed, because people had great difficulty talking about their real concerns and feelings. Occasionally, we role-played how one might express a dissatisfaction to a co-worker or to the director or how one might demonstrate a childcare technique to a parent rather than merely tell the parent how to do it.

At a minimum, adolescents and their families -- in cooperation with the schools -- are mutually concerned that the young parent achieve a functional education, employment, independence, supports toward adequate parenting and opportunities for marriage or other forms of lasting relationships. These goals are, in my

opinion, not realizable for youth within the current context of our schools -- and are even more elusive for Black adolescent parents. The issue of assuring that young people and their children have an adequate sense of identity, coupled with the kinds of skills necessary for their living, has to be readdressed. Promotion of a positive self-concept is not enough since there is evidence that many youths fail academically, even when having strong self-concepts (Massey et al, 1975). Increased attention must be devoted to promoting opportunities for adults who work with these young parents and their children to have self-realizing experiences, too. Again, I see modelling as an effective strategy in addressing these concerns.

It seems to me that our consultative attention to these concerns has to incorporate a heightened intentionality toward young parents and children -- an intentionality of purpose and commitment informed by new insights. These insights need to grow from an evolving knowledge about history, culture, childrearing practices and psychosocial realities of a client sub-group until recently largely overlooked in consultation theory, research and practice.

In concluding, I would like to say a bit about powerlessness and its impact on people's learning and growing potential (Zahn, 1969) since many people -- providers and users -- in day care are essentially powerless to influence what happens either to them in the society or to the children in the day care program. A person's failure to develop a sense of confidence in his/her ability to change things (make a difference) results

in feelings of alienation and may result in what is perceived to be non-involvement. In other words, the person incorporates the stereotypical attitudes we have discussed, whether the person be aide, young parent or administrator.

If consultation is to be the liberating, change-inducing catalyst which I think it can be at times, the consultant must give attention to creating a psychological climate conducive to achievement of the desired liberation (Freire, 1972; Rogers, undated reprint). There is much to be learned from psychology and counselling regarding the creation of these supportive environments (Day, 1977).

These understandings would -- it seems to me -- lend added relevance to the consultant's perceptions of the day care situation and his/her ability to influence it. The destiny of adolescents as young parents and of their children can be critically influenced by our success or failure as consultants in addressing their needs as defined within the developmental and cultural contexts which I have presented.

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